

Psychology: Some Answers For Christians--a booklet

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)

by

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A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "John Strouse". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

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Purpose of Thesis

Due to the fact that psychological terms and principles have become such an influential part of our lives, Christians are being faced daily with dilemmas which result from possible contradictions between psychology and Christianity. Unfortunately, most Christians do not have the background necessary to understand much of what is presented to them, and to discern the good from the bad.

This booklet is an attempt to remedy this situation. The purpose of this booklet is to answer some basic questions about psychology from a Christian perspective. This booklet is not meant to be an exhaustive source by any means, but simply an introduction to some of the issues that face Christians in a psychological society.

Included in this project is also a paper explaining in some detail the project which has been done. The paper includes a description of the project, a brief review of the literature, the reasoning behind some of the characteristics of the project, and possible uses for the project.

During my time as a psychology major at Ball State, I have often been bothered by the vast difference between the views of secular psychology and the Bible. As a Christian, I have struggled in many classes to understand these differences. I have attempted to discern what of secular psychology is in agreement with biblical principles and could prove useful and what was actually unscriptural.

While I definitely feel that the time I have spent trying to understand what psychology has to offer from a Christian perspective has been valuable, it has also proved to be difficult and has taken much work. This is not an area which can be easily understood.

Due to the fact that psychological terms and principles have become such an influential part of our society, Christians are being faced daily with dilemmas which result from the possible contradictions between psychology and the Bible. These issues are becoming much more a part of our lives. Unfortunately, most Christians are unprepared to discern the good from the bad. They do not have the information and the background necessary to understand and examine much of what is presented to them.

This situation has given rise to my senior honors project. I have developed and put together a booklet which attempts to answer some basic questions about psychology from a Christian perspective. I have addressed issues which I believe are of concern to the general population of Christians today. This booklet could be very helpful for Christians who are unsure what out of psychology can be helpful and what is contrary to the Word of God.

In preparing to put together this booklet, I spent a great deal of time studying what literature was currently available on this and related topics. There are many resources which deal with some issues of psychology from a Christian perspective.

Some of these sources explain a method of counseling. Others tell some of the risks and rewards of integrating psychological principles with the Christian faith. Still others defend the role of counseling in the Christian's life. One source that is available, *Can You Trust Psychology?*, by Gary Collins, does attempt to address the issues that a Christian unfamiliar with psychological topics may be interested in. This book is very useful as a resource, but I believe it has a major limitation. The book covers many specialized topics, which forces it to be fairly lengthy. This can easily intimidate those who may be interested in this topic but feel they do not have time for in-depth research.

I also investigated available literature from the field of secular psychology. Some various research articles and books proved to be relevant to the topics I was eager to discuss. Different authors' opinions and insights on the need for counseling, the effectiveness of counseling, and the structure of counseling all proved to be useful to me as I began the composition of my project.

It was a challenge to me to attempt to integrate various, sometimes conflicting, ideas. However, this is a challenge that I have been involved with for the past several years. As a Christian psychology student at a public university, I have often had my beliefs questioned. I have also often questioned the beliefs of others. Knowing that the Bible is completely true, I felt it was necessary to call into question anything that appeared to contradict the Bible. This was also important as I worked on this project.

One of the first steps I took in beginning this project was to attempt to discover what topics people would be interested in learning more about. I personally questioned a number of people to discover what issues they thought were important. I also constructed a survey with questions about various topics relating to psychology and Christianity. The main goal of this survey was to find out what questions Christians are asking about psychology in an effort to address the issues that people

are actually concerned with. The survey was helpful in that it gave me some direction to head in as I began to put together this project. This survey was not given systematically, but was a sample of convenience. I gave the survey to the members of my church congregation. A copy of this survey is included at the end of this paper.

I discovered that there are many issues relating to psychology which Christians are very curious about. Some sample questions and portions of the answers that I have included in my booklet are:

Why should a Christian get counseling if God meets all our needs?

There are those who feel that people who are praying and reading God's word should have no need for counseling....Counseling is not meant to replace those truths in our lives, but to help us apply them.

Does it matter if the counseling I get is specifically Christian?

A final concern with counseling that is not based on the Bible is that it is incomplete....counseling that leaves out our need for God can never be enough.

Can psychology and Christianity be integrated?

God has obviously revealed much about the way people function in His word. Because psychology is concerned with the functioning of people, it seems reasonable that these two areas might have something to offer each other.

This project has potential to be very useful. Because it addresses questions that people are asking, it has value as a informative booklet. People will want to read this because it is concerned with real issues in their lives. People who desire to know more about psychology, but do not have the time or capability to do a great deal of research on their own will find this to be helpful.

The booklet is not designed to be exhaustive on the topic of psychology for Christians. It is meant to provide an overview for those with questions. The length of

this booklet was purposely kept down so that it would be a more useful resource to today's busy Christians. At the end of the booklet I have provided a section listing some sources a person could seek out if they were interested in further reading on this topic or a topic related to it.

Throughout this booklet I have used personal pronouns in many instances. I am aware that this is not the usual procedure in most types of literature, but I believe it is important in this case. The use of personal pronouns causes this booklet to have a more personal feel. This not only allows it to bring up some touchy subjects without seeming harsh or judgemental, but it also enables the reader to see that these issues do indeed apply to him or her.

One possible use of this booklet is to have it available at various churches so that when a need arises, this booklet can help to meet this need. If someone has a problem arise in his life which may require counseling, yet he is intimidated by the idea of counseling, or he feels like getting counseling would be admitting failure, this booklet would be an excellent resource to introduce him to the basics of counseling. It would be easy to have these booklets available at information tables within churches.

Another possible use of this booklet is as a public relations document for Christian counselors. Many Christians are fearful of psychology, and Christian counselors can be seen either as having nothing new to offer to Christians, or as having abandoned their faith and sold out to psychology. There are definitely Christian counselors who are not teaching biblical principles in helpful ways, but the majority are not the detrimental influence many people see them to be. This booklet would answer some basic questions people have and dispell fears that are keeping people from approaching counselors to find the help and heling they may need. I

have plans to copyright this booklet and approach various Christian counselors and counseling organizations to attempt to sell copies of the booklet.

The references in this booklet were done in an unusual way. The listing of references at the end of the booklet was done in American Psychological Association style, which is the style most appropriate to a booklet about psychology. However, in order to prevent distraction of readers as they go through the booklet, the references within the booklet are not done in normal APA style. Rather than include the last name of the author and the year of publication in the text, I simply included a reference number. The sources are listed in the end of the booklet by these numbers and all necessary information is provided, including page numbers for the various quotes used throughout the booklet.

This booklet has been carefully constructed to be useful to the average Christian. I believe that it addresses issues that are of great importance in the society we live in, and I believe it does this in a non-threatening, helpful way. I hope to make this booklet available for actual use in the near future. I have learned much in the construction of this booklet, and I do feel that it has brought together that which I have learned in the last four years as a student at Ball State.

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Attitude Survey

1. I think that psychology has some helpful insights to offer.

True False

2. If I were having a serious problem with depression, self-esteem, etc. I would seek the help of a psychologist.

definitely probably doubtful not sure never

Why or why not? _____

3. It is easy for me to tell if things agree or disagree with the Bible.

True False

4. If I were to ever seek the help of a professional psychologist, it would most likely be due to:(ex. abuse, addiction, self-esteem, depression...)

5. I think that some of psychology is contradictory to the Bible.

True False

6. I would be more likely to seek the help of a secular (non-Christian) psychologist than a Christian counselor.

True False

Why or why not? _____

7. I would be interested in reading a small booklet explaining some of the similarities and differences between psychology and Christianity.

Yes No

THANK YOU FOR YOUR HELP!